

Limestone Head of an Apostle

French, Toulouse, ca. 1321 - 1348

Purchase from the J.H. Wade Fund, 1960

Recommended negative: 31876 (the best front view)

The acquisition of this overlife size head brings to the Cleveland Museum a rare and fine example of medieval monumental sculpture. Impressive is the subtle organization of opposing curls and keenly delineated lines and planes of the face. The over all plastic effect is one of great strength and power; it is a notable embodiment of medieval religious belief.

Considered art historically, this sculpture is an outstanding example of XIV century Gothic style. Here can be seen the elements of the characteristic naturalism and decorative curvilinear lilt or rhythm which can be found at this time ^{not} only in stone sculpture but in ivory carvings and illuminated manuscripts (see examples in CMA collection, for instance). However, in this sculpture, these elements work within the context of a very expressive whole. This expressiveness recalls, in its abstract aspect, forerunners in the earlier Romanesque times; whereas, in its naturalistic and monumental aspect, it anticipates a later generation of artists, such as Claus Sluter and his followers.

The exact origin of this limestone head is not yet proven, although it can be with fair certainty suggested. Jean Tissandier, Bishop of Rieux during the early XIV century, ordered a group of sculptures including figures of Christ, the Virgin, twelve Apostles, and saints particularly venerated by the Franciscan Order. These ~~used~~ ^{were} used in his sepulchral chapel, called "Chapelle de Rieux," in the Church of Cordeliers, Toulouse. The new acquisition probably belonged to this group of sculptures and was carved with them in the region of Toulouse. The rest of the

group is preserved in the Musée des Augustin, Toulouse, and p.2
in the Musée de Bayonne. The chapel was destroyed in the nineteenth
century.

William D. Wixon